

Minutes of the SDTC Meeting of February 10, 2021

The monthly meeting of the Sudbury Democratic Town Committee was called to order on Zoom by the Chair, Tania Vitvitsky, at 7:05 pm on February 10th, 2021. Also attending were Carmine Gentile Vice-Chair, Sue Rushfirth Treasurer, Peg Espinola Secretary, and members Lisa Kouchakjian, Linda Hench-Gentile, Carl Offner, Barbara Ryan, Jeanne Maloney, Colin Warwick, Andrew Bettinelli, Ann Barysh, John Riordan, Christina Riordan, Jennifer Roberts, Henry Noer, Hank Sorrett, Marilyn Riepe, Frank Riepe, Mike Ferrari, John McQueen, Gary Bean, Aruna Pundit, and Eva Fridman. Attending as guests were Ruth Curry, Joanne Minassian, Dhruva Sen, Janie Dretler, Tyler Steffey, Christopher Lorant and Don Chauls. A special welcome was extended to Don, a former member who dropped in via Zoom from his home in Maryland.

The **minutes of the January meeting** were corrected by the addition of Christina Riordan to the list of members in attendance. They were then accepted unanimously. Christina was inadvertently omitted from the December minutes as well, which have also been corrected.

The **Treasurer's Report** was read and accepted unanimously. There is \$939.39 in the account. All bills have been paid.

Communications: We have received thank-you letters from the **Ossoff campaign** for our donation of \$200, and from the **Sudbury Food Pantry** for our contribution of 18 banana boxes of donated food following our successful drive on the National Day of Service, January 18. Tania reported that this would translate to 75 to 80 bags of food for Food Bank recipients. We thanked Lisa Kouchakjian and her family for the use of their home and driveway for this event. A motion was made and seconded that we make the drive for the Pantry an annual event. It was passed unanimously. Lisa indicated that she would be happy to make her driveway available again.

Report by Carmine Gentile on the State Legislature: The filing date for new legislation has been moved out a month, to February 19. There will be no formal sessions this week or next week, during the February vacation break. Committee assignments have yet to be announced. Governor Baker sent back the climate bill that the two chambers of the Legislature had agreed upon with amendments of his own. Carmine expressed confidence that most or all would be overridden, as they are perceived as weakening the bill in significant ways.

Report by Jennifer Roberts on activities of the Select Board: Jen reported that the Board was "knee deep in the budget cycle" and "on the path to Town Meeting in the spring." Because of the possible need to hold Town Meeting outside this year, Town Meeting is scheduled for May 3rd, but may be held on Saturday, May 22. May 23 is the carry-over and rain date; if it rains both days Town Meeting will have to be postponed till June. This year only thirty-six articles will be on the warrant, half of what was the case in the fall. There were no citizen petitions. Due to the overall reduced number, Town Meeting may move along faster and fewer items may be placed on the consent calendar.

Jen announced that the new Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Commission is accepting applications for members through February 16. Another innovation is the introduction of KPI, or Key Performance Indicators, as an aid for the Board in monitoring major projects being undertaken in Sudbury. Jen discussed the Board of Health's involvement in contact tracing and vaccinations to stem the spread of COVID19. Jen reported that it was anticipated that the Board of Health would receive vaccines in buckets of one hundred, at a time to be announced.

Carmine mentioned that he has made inquiries as to why our town has yet to receive any vaccine, in contrast to some neighboring towns. He said that he and other legislators are planning to speak out about problems with the rollout of vaccination in MA and policies such as the new "buddy" plan whereby younger people who bring those seventy-five and over to their appointments can also get shots, ahead of those in higher priority groups.

Presentations by two candidates for the Select Board: **Janie Dretler** is an incumbent member and present Select Board Chair. **Lisa Kouchakjian** is a member of the SDTC and a former member and Chair of the Sudbury K-8 School Committee.

Janie went first, recounting the achievements of the Board since she joined in 2018, including the hiring of the new Town Manager, getting the Community Center and the CSX land acquisition through Town Meeting and making headway on the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail plans. She contributed to the creation of the new Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Commission, supported new environmental bylaws, was a member of the Master Plan Steering Committee, and saw the realization of her original idea, to make the name of the Select Board gender-neutral. She laid out some of the work that is still to be done and in which she hopes to have a part. This includes seeing that the Rail Trail proceeds fast enough not to lose out on State funding.

Lisa explained why she is running for the Select Board and showed us slides from her new website, Building a Strong, United Sudbury with Experienced/Tested Leadership. She noted her past experience as an attorney as well as what she has learned from her six years on the Sudbury School Committee. Hers would be a non-partisan approach to local governance: "We should represent everybody." In addition to her School Committee experience she has been a member of the Special Education Parent Advisory Council (LSSEPAC).

Hank Sorrett raised the issue of video cameras in the schools, especially the fact that the Sudbury Police Department has access to the cameras in the high school. Carmine pointed out that the cameras are not monitored; it is rather that if something happens, "they can go back and take a look." Lisa said she is concerned about privacy but feels there must be a balance with safety. In general she has found the Police Department, and particularly the resource officers, to be very helpful.

Candidates for the K-8 School Committee: As is the case with the Select Board, there are three candidates for two open slots. **Tyler Steffey** asked to present at this meeting. The other two candidates also asked to present to the SDTC but were unavailable for this meeting. They may present at our March meeting. **The election for all Town offices is March 29.**

Tyler, who moved here three years ago, has a kindergartner and a second grader at the Haynes School. He has twenty years of experience working in schools, including eleven years in K-8 schools. He is currently the Assistant Principal at the Concord Middle School. He believes that one of the challenges in the coming year will be welcoming our kids back to school and providing them with social and emotional support after the experience they have had this year with remote and hybrid learning. He is offering weekly Zoom calls at 8 pm on Tuesdays; they can be accessed through his website, www.steffeyforsudbury.com. He is a believer in "a culture of growth, not just mastery" and emphasizes the importance of civics. In response to a question, he replied that he is very much in favor of bringing in outsiders to speak to children about their specialties.

The final part of our official meeting concerned what role we believe we should play as we look to the upcoming elections in 2022. A lively discussion ensued regarding our priorities--state versus national races. Some felt strongly that our emphasis should be on the MA races. Others were interested as well in our supporting out-of-state candidates in important races, as we did this year. Many indicated that we needed a better idea of what Democrats are likely to be running for election in 2022, as well as what organizations offer opportunities to work in nationwide campaigns. The question also arose as to whom we might wish to invite to speak to us. Carmine agreed to provide contact information for some of our likely choices. A subcommittee was created to explore these issues, consisting of Jeanne Maloney, Tania Vitvitsky, Carmine Gentile, Andrew Bettinelli and Ann Barysh. They will meet before our next general meeting.

We adjourned at 8:43 pm with the understanding that some might like to stay on afterward to discuss informally the matter of the rift between the Library Trustees and the Friends of the Library, which is of great concern in the town. It was understood that this was not part of our official business, as we do not have an official role to play in it.

Peg Espinola, Secretary